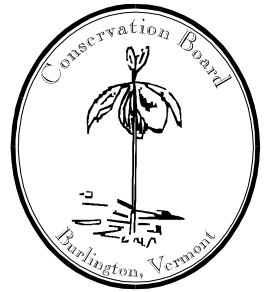


Burlington Conservation Board

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*Miles Waite, Chair
Zoe Richards
Don Meals
Matt Moore
Ryan Crehan
Hannah Brislin
Rebecca Roman
Tori Hellwig
Jules Lees*



Conservation Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, December 7, 2020 – 5:30 pm
Remote Meeting

Attendance

- **Board Members:** Zoe Richards (ZR), Ryan Crehan (RC), Miles Waite (MW), Rebecca Roman (RR), Don Meals (DM), Tori Hellwig (TH), Matt Moore (MM), Hannah Brislin (HB)
- **Absent:** Jules Lees (JL)
- **Public:** Patrick Dunsieith, Rowan Cignoni
- **Staff:** Scott Gustin (Permitting & Inspections), Dan Cahill, Deryk Roach (Parks & Recreation), James Sherrard (Stormwater Program)

MW, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Minutes

A Motion was made by: DM and SECONDED by ZR:

Approve the meeting minutes of November 2, 2020 as written.

Vote: 7-0-0 (no MM or JL yet), motion carried.

Board Comment

ZR, let's take some time at our next meeting for each of us to say why they joined the Conservation Board and what they hope to accomplish. RR and others agree.

MW, UVM is contemplating cutting the geology program. Perhaps we can present a letter to the president and board of trustees to reconsider. DM, is the proposal to do away with the department entirely or just the grad program or somewhere in between? MW said he thinks its somewhere in between. Geology staff may be integrated with other programs.

Public Comment

Rowan Cignoni said he'd like to speak to the Intervale deer management item.

Open Space Subcommittee

1. Open Space Addendum & funding request

SG overviewed the background of the Addendum work and the request for funding the consultant services with Legacy Fund monies. The same was done for the 2014 update of the Open Space Protection Plan. He noted the prior discussion about providing more flexibility in the funding amount, but the Board should stay at \$25K for now to keep things on track for December 21 Board of Finance and City Council. DM said that additional funding request should come from the consultant and be considered by the Board. Dan Cahill said that any change in budget would come back to the Board. MW agreed with the \$25K figure.

The programs and services of the Dept. of Permitting & Inspections are accessible to people with disabilities. For accessibility information call 865-7188.

A MOTION was made by MM and SECONDED by HB:

Approve the Legacy Fund request of up to \$25,000 for consultant services for the Open Space Addendum.

Vote: 8-0-0, motion carried.

2. Conservation Legacy Fund Logo

Dan Cahill displayed three draft logos for the BCLF and recapped the Open Space Subcommittee discussion around display of a property conserved with BCLF monies. MM likes the idea to continue to explore ideas. HB said that a couple of the drafts depict the "City of Burlington" like the Hollywood sign in California. RR said that it would be cool to highlight the synergy of housing and conservation in the logo. It's the direction we should be going in for a more sustainable future. RC said that Camel's Hump is in profile when viewing the city from Rock Point. He agrees with conserved land, perhaps less building. DM agrees with RR's points, but disagrees with highlighting a development within the logo. He likes the idea of a more natural image. He also noted that the best logos are simple. RC said that BTVcityandlake.org has an image that could serve as a good starting point for a logo.

Update & Discussion

1. Intervale Deer Management

Patrick Dunsieith (Intervale Center) and Dan Cahill appeared on behalf of this item.

Mr. Cahill provided an overview as to deer impacts on ecology and food security. It's become apparent that city ordinances preclude some potential methods of deer management, such as bow hunting. He and Patrick are seeking input from the Board as to this item.

Patrick Dunsieith introduced himself to the Board. The overabundance of deer within the Intervale has been a problem for a number of years now. Statewide, hunting licenses are declining, and deer densities are above target levels in and around Burlington. Mr. Cahill said that restoration projects have been adversely impacted by deer. For example, 71% of the tree plantings at McKenzie were browsed.

Mr. Dunsieith said that the Intervale Conservation Nursery is being significantly affected. The deer are browsing nearly everything. Farmers are seeing deer browse on their crops as well. In addition, deer droppings adversely impact the crops. Crop losses are significant as are costs associated with preventative measures such as electrical fencing.

Mr. Cahill said that community gardens at Starr Farm and Rock Point are being impacted as well. Food security is adversely affected.

Mr. Dunsieith said that bow hunting is contemplated. Safety, designated areas, and support from VT Fish and Wildlife are important. Shelburne Farms provides a valuable example. It's hard to imagine a future where we can control deer numbers without hunting.

ZR said that there are a lot of reasons why deer are so out of balance. We've wiped out all of the predators – a prey population with no predator. This is also a climate change problem. Deer benefit from climate change – with less snow, deer are better able to survive. When deer over browse, song bird habitat is adversely affected. Mr. Dunsieith also noted correlation between deer populations and tick borne illnesses.

Mr. Cahill asked about next steps. Identify opportunities, needed policy changes, and long term studies. Moving forward will require substantive community dialogue.

HB mentioned Rutland, VT that addressed deer management. If people are well educated as to the purpose, they will see the benefit. This problem has real consequences for wildlife habitat and food security. Bow hunting seems like a wise decision moving forward. Be sure to educate people who come from this outside of their lifestyle. DM, we should be prepared for a lot of pushback. He noted the cormorant control program and swans that were in Mallet's Bay. We need to have a lot of education on this matter, as well as some action.

MW, what does the green area in the map represent? Mr. Dunsieith replied that it is a potential designated area for hunting. It's away from farm fields and recreational resources. MW thinks perhaps more of the Intervale could be included. Mr. Dunsieith, enabling farmers to secure depredation permits may be a possibility as well. That would allow for broader control of deer numbers.

Rowan Cignoni is a Burlington resident and bow hunter. He is invested in seeing a program like this succeed. There is overwhelming evidence that shows deer over browsing adversely affects ecology and habitat. Long term native species recovery requires sustained reductions in deer numbers coupled with repeated vegetation surveys. He noted that humans have hunted these lands for thousands of years. He posited that folks would be willing to pay extra for the opportunity to bow hunt in the Intervale.

RR agrees with Rowan's perception of humans as part of the natural world. This is conserved land. VLT has worked to educate landowners about the benefits of hunters on the land. She noted the impacts on invasive species spread due to deer browse on native plants.

Mr. Dunsieith noted a few helpful online resources as to deer management in similar situations.

Mr. Cahill said that this potential management method presently cannot happen. Policy and ordinance change are needed, and he sees the Conservation Board playing a central role in discussions around this item. Is this a role the BCB is willing to play?

ZR, what is the order of things moving ahead? Mr. Dunsieith is unsure of the best order. It is best to start with the problem. The overabundance of deer in the Intervale is generating a host of problems as we've addressed tonight. This is not about hunting. Building understanding seems like a good place to start. ZR mentioned the NPA's as a place to introduce the issue.

DM, likes the way the issue is framed – identify the "what" and "why" of the problem. Perhaps tonight's presentation can be revamped to present to the NPA's. Following that, the Conservation Board could provide a recommendation to the City Council.

Mr. Cignoni agreed and commented that the practice and act of hunting deserves to be part of the discussion – as an act of conservation.

MW summed up NPA's first and then on to the Conservation Board for a recommendation to the City Council.

2. City streets green infrastructure and maintenance

James Sherrard and Deryk Roach appeared on behalf of this item.

James Sherrard overviewed the city's bioretention systems. The city has 24 such systems now. There are 13 in the ONE, and most of the rest are downtown. The number of systems is expected to double within the next year. Parks & Rec maintains some of the systems. Staffing is a challenge. The stormwater program hired a private landscaper to maintain some of the systems this year and will likely do so next year. Beyond that, the door is open to conversation as to how these systems are maintained. Construction can involve DPW, stormwater, or Parks & Rec. Regardless of who installs the system, the stormwater program usually gets involved in its maintenance. With a living system, there will always be an interim time between installation and established vegetation.

RC, what about the system by the skate park? Phragmites is beginning to encroach into it. Mr. Sherrard said that it will need to be dredged intermittently. Revegetation will be needed after every time it's dredged.

ZR said she loves the new installation on St. Paul Street. Do you feel too stretched in dealing with these installations? Deryk Roach said the city is very stretched, particularly now. Everyone wants to keep the lake clean, but the city lacks the resources to do everything it wants to do. How can we utilize existing resources to create the most efficient and effective program?

ZR mentioned possible funding early in the Biden administration as to green projects. The goal of the money is to actually create jobs.

MM, are the installations working? Mr. Sherrard, yes. Sediments and phosphorous and metals are being captured. Mr. Roach said that there is no dirt in St. Paul Street following rain storms.

3. Shoreline zoning amendments

SG overviewed the draft zoning amendment. It has two pieces. One establishes a maximum front yard setback for shoreline residential properties that will limit instances wherein the front yard setback forces development closer to the lakeshore. The other piece establishes a threshold for revegetation (no mow zones) of the lakeshore for development above a certain threshold. The idea is to move toward ecological improvement of the city's shoreline, rather than simply not making it any worse.

RC said that we should think about application guidelines for applicants to have prior to applying. What do they need to address and provide? SG mentioned a possible guide – something that NR 206 could do. It could even be a Burlington-centric guide for shoreline development.

A MOTION was made by DM and SECONDED by ZR:

Recommend approval of the proposed shoreline amendment as drafted.

DM requested being kept in the loop as this moves through the process.

Vote: 8-0-0, motion carried.

4. Draft 2021 meeting schedules

A MOTION was made by MM and SECONDED by MW:

Approve the draft meeting schedules for 2021.

Vote 8-0-0, motion carried.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 7:20 PM.